

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
3 June 2015

Original: English

**Letter dated 3 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of
Albania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the
Security Council**

I have the honour to inform you that, on 19 and 20 May 2015, ministers from the Western Balkans and senior officials from partner countries and organizations, including the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council and the United Nations, as well as representatives of local government, civil society and the private sector, met in Tirana for a regional summit on countering violent extremism.

In the context of the growing emphasis on addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism at the global, regional, national and local levels to prevent radicalization, I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and the conclusions from the regional summit (see annex) as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ferit Hoxha
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 3 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Albania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Balkans regional summit on countering violent extremism

Tirana, 19 and 20 May 2015

Chair's conclusions

Ministers from the Western Balkans and senior officials from partner countries and organizations, including the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Regional Cooperation Council and the United Nations, as well as representatives of local governments, civil society and the private sector, met in Tirana on 19 and 20 May for a regional summit on countering violent extremism. That event, which had been announced by Albania at a ministerial summit convened in Washington, D.C., on 19 February, on countering violent extremism, catalysed grass-roots efforts to counter violent extremism, while focusing attention on the elements of the follow-up action agenda of the summit of 19 February most relevant to the Western Balkans. Participants engaged in an open, collaborative discussion with a view to developing new strategies and specific programmes and initiatives that would be announced at a summit of leaders on countering violent extremism, to be held in New York in September 2015.

During the course of the discussions, participants:

(a) Highlighted how no country in the region was immune to the threat posed by terrorism, in particular by foreign terrorist fighters travelling to and returning from Syria and Iraq, and violent extremism more broadly, and underscored how that pipeline created real vulnerabilities for the Balkans and Europe as the fighters returned home and recruited;

(b) Underscored their commitment to countering violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations that lead to terrorism, as well as addressing the drivers of that extremism;

(c) Welcomed progress made in strengthening legal, institutional and operational frameworks and capacities to counter terrorism and address the challenges of foreign terrorist fighters, while protecting civil rights and liberties;

(d) Highlighted the importance of further strengthening regional cooperation in that area, welcoming the inclusive regional conference that the Government of Serbia hosted on 29 and 30 April to deepen regional cooperation on a range of counter-terrorism issues and to discuss shared regional counter-terrorism challenges; the meeting that the Government of Slovenia and the European Union co-hosted in October 2014 on counter-terrorism challenges, including countering violent extremism, in the Balkans and the conference in September 2015 to be co-hosted by the Council of Europe and the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue focused specifically on preventing radicalization;

(e) Encouraged regional organizations such as OSCE and the Regional Cooperation Council to continue to play an active role in promoting such

cooperation and to enhance engagement on capacity-building and awareness-raising efforts;

(f) Reaffirmed the role of the United Nations in efforts to address violent extremism and the comprehensive framework that the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy offered for addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and acknowledged the commitments made in Security Council resolution 2178 (2014), welcoming the attention to the role of communities in countering violent extremism;

(g) Emphasized that the most effective way to address those challenges was through a comprehensive strategy that identified and developed a wide range of rights-respecting tools to tackle the underlying drivers that fuelled the appeal and spread of violent extremism;

(h) Reiterated that countering and preventing the spread of violent extremism required localized, specialized and expanded efforts, thus reinforcing the need to further empower local actors — municipal governments, youth, families, marginalized community members and religious, cultural and education leaders — and to adopt tailored approaches, including those sensitive to local cultures and religious beliefs, to address that phenomenon;

(i) Recognized that women were also vulnerable to radicalization and were participating in terrorist groups and serving as foreign terrorist fighters, and underscored the important role that women played in countering violent extremism and committed themselves to integrating women into efforts to counter violent extremism;

(j) Emphasized the importance of developing comprehensive national strategies and plans of action to address violent extremism that included a diversity of national government agencies and representatives of municipal governments and civil society in the design and implementation of such frameworks to counter violent extremism, and encouraged the United Nations, OSCE, Hedayah and other international partners to provide capacity-building support to Governments interested in developing such frameworks;

(k) Underscored the need to work together to better understand the precise nature of violent extremist threats at the local and regional levels, including by promoting local research, analysis and information-sharing on the drivers of violent extremism in all its forms for all segments of society, including women and youth, and on how best to counter those drivers, and expressed an interest in developing a regional radicalization awareness network on countering violent extremism that could be modelled on the Radicalization Awareness Network of the European Commission and other relevant training/research networks on countering violent extremism;

(l) Reaffirmed that respect for human rights must be a central element of any effective strategy to counter violent extremism and committed themselves to strengthening human rights protections for everyone in the region, including for members of religious and ethnic minorities, and, as part of that effort, underscored the importance of strengthening relations between law enforcement and the communities that they were meant to serve, recognizing that abuses of human rights could feed that threat;

(m) Underscored that government officials at all levels must refrain from policies and actions that fuelled or exploited ethnic tension or marginalized members of minorities;

(n) Recognized the importance of developing an approach to managing the threat posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters that included either prosecution or, where appropriate, rule of law-based rehabilitation and reintegration or other diversion programmes, and underscored their commitment to working to develop national programmes based on United Nations and other international good practices, including those of the Global Counterterrorism Forum;

(o) Highlighted the corrosive messages of violent extremists and the need to intensify efforts to push back with community-driven counter-narratives that amplified authentic and credible voices and, in that context, to use the power and reach of social media to challenge violent extremists' messaging through positive alternative narratives and, in turn, delegitimize violent extremist ideologies;

(p) Stressed the importance of building communities that were resilient to the spread of violent extremism and the need to expand social services and provide educational and economic opportunities, in particular for members of marginalized populations and youth, to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable citizens, and underscored the need to expand programmes that empowered youth and other young leaders, promote entrepreneurship and economic opportunity and enhance civic education and a culture of tolerance and non-violence.

During the discussions, participants highlighted specific steps that could be taken to enhance national and regional efforts to counter violent extremism in the Western Balkans and committed themselves to working together to make progress on those drivers in advance of and following the summit of leaders in New York in September 2015. Those included:

(a) Identifying national government points of contact on countering violent extremism from each country in the region;

(b) Developing inclusive national strategies on countering violent extremism that involved municipal governments, civil society and the private sector in the design and implementation;

(c) Identifying and supporting specific youth, women and religious leaders and other civil society and community-led projects designed to address the local drivers of violent extremism and populations at risk of recruitment and radicalization;

(d) Developing a radicalization awareness network for the Balkans region informed by the experience of the European Union and other relevant partners that connected national and local practitioners and researchers analysing the local drivers of and effective interventions against violent extremism;

(e) Launching a youth-focused civil society network in the Balkans region to counter violent extremism that could be linked to similar networks possibly being developed in other regions to ensure that those operating on the front lines were better connected and sharing the most innovative best practices;

(f) Identifying mayors and other municipal leaders in the region who would want to join a global network of cities and other municipal leaders against violent extremism that was expected to be launched in the third quarter of 2015;

(g) Developing and/or expanding programmes for countering radicalization in prisons and promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders, including returning foreign terrorist fighters, drawing on United Nations and Global Counterterrorism Forum good practices and expertise, where appropriate;

(h) Building the capacity of civil society organizations and other non-government partners in the region to use social media and other technology tools to better amplify an alternative, affirmative narrative to counter the hateful and violence-filled narratives being propagated by Daesh and other violent extremist groups;

(i) Working with the private sector to offer mentorship, internships, vocational training and other pathways to employment that provided economic and social opportunities and strengthened resilience against radicalization.